

Japanese New Religions
An Overview and Selected
Examples
Franz Winter

Overview of the lecture

- General introduction into the history of Japanese religions and the traditional religions of Japan
- The „New Religions“ (*shinshūkyō* 新宗教)
Periodization and general questions
- Selected examples of the „older period“ (*until 1970ties*):
Tenrikyō 天理教
Sōka Gakkai 創価学会
- Recent developments: General characteristics of the „new new religions“ (*shin-shinshūkyō* 新新宗教)
- Selected examples:
Kōfuku no kagaku 幸福の科学
Aum Shinrikyō 幸福の科学

„New“– „Old“?

- „New Religions“ (*shinshūkyō* 新宗教) of Japan
- Definition of „new religion“, „new religious movements“, „Neureligion“
- Importance in Japanese society
- The „new new religions“ (*shin-shinshūkyō* 新新宗教)

Religion in Japan: A Tapestry of Traditions

- „Established religions“ (*kisei shūkyō* 既成宗教) or „traditional religions“ (*dentō shūkyō* 伝統宗教), mainly:
Shintō
Buddhism

Taoism
Confucianism
(Christianity)



Shintō 神道

- Shintō 神道: „Way of the Gods“ (*kami* 神)
- Conglomeration of religious practices
- Formation as a reaction to influence of Buddhism and Taoism
- *Material collected in Kojiki* 古事記 and *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀

Kojiki 古事記 („Record of Ancient Matters“)

- The names of the Deities that were born in the Plain of High Heaven when the Heaven and Earth began were the Deity Master-of-the-August-Centre-of-Heaven, next the High-August-Producing-Wondrous-Deity, next the Divine-Producing-Wondrous-Deity. These three Deities were all Deities born alone, and hid their persons. The names of the Deities that were born next from a thing that sprouted up like unto a reed-shoot when the earth, young and like unto floating oil, drifted about medusa-like, were the Pleasant-Reed-Shoot-Prince-Elder-Deity, next the Heavenly-Eternally-Standing-Deity. These two Deities were likewise born alone, and hid their persons.

(Kojiki, transl. Chamberlain, 1919)



Izanami and Izanagi creating the earth

Amaterasu



Importance of Shintō

- Shintō as „state-religion“ especially from 1868 („Meiji-revolution“) -1945
- After WWII: state and religion became separated



Shintō shrines

- Local god (*ujigami*)
- or
- important gods:
Inari
Hachiman
- or
- History of Japan



Fushimi Inari Taisha



Nikko Toshogu Gate

Shintō festivals (*matsuri*)



Gion Matsuri, Kyoto

Buddhism (*bukkyō* 仏教)

- Since early 6th century from Korea
- Prince Shōtoku Taishi 聖徳太子 (574-622)
- First traditions:
„Esoteric Buddhism“: Tendai and Shingon

Spread of Buddhism



Various traditions

- Amida or „Pure Land“-Buddhism: *namu Amida Butsu*
- Nichiren-Buddhism: based on „Lotus Sutra“: *namu myōhō rengekyō*
- Zen-Traditions: Eisai (1141-1215) and Dogen (1200-1253): direct achievement of enlightenment (*satori*)



Buddhism and Japanese culture

- *Bushidō* 武士道: „Way of the Warrior“
- *Chadō* 茶道: „Way of the Tea“
- *Nō* 能
- Calligraphy
- Poetry

Christianity

- 1) Jesuit missionary Francis Xavier 1549
 1597: Crucifixion of 26 martyrs
 1614: Christianity is proscribed
 „Hidden Christians“: *Kakure Kirishitan*
- 2) 1859/1873: new missionary activities, mainly in the North (Hokkaidō)
- 3) Post-WWII-Period: only minor gains until today

But: Important as expression of Western culture

Taoism and Confucianism

- Confucianism: ethical and political philosophy, important especially 6th-9th century and in the Edo-period (1600-1868)
- Taoism: important on different layers, mainly in popular culture until today

New Religions?

- Continuity of new religions with traditional traditions
- General tendency to form new traditions
- Formation of sects/new approaches within the traditional religious cooperations
- „New Religions“ are *not* a totally new period within the history of Japanese religions

Periodization (according to Takagi Hirō)

1. 19th/early 20th century: „Meiji-revolution“
2. Taishō (1912-1926) and early Shōwa-era
3. After 1945: Postwar period
4. from the 70ties onwards: *shin-shinshūkyō*
新新宗教
5. After 1995

1st Period

- 1) 19th century: End of isolation in Edō-period (1600-) in 1868:
“Meiji”-revolution:

Tenrikyō 天理教 1838

Kurozumikyō 黒住教 1846

Konkōkyō 金光教 1859

Ōmoto 大本 1892

Characteristics

- Mainly *Shintō* background
- Some groups organized as “Sect-Shintō”
kyōha shintō 教派神道 (*not: State Shintō, kokka Shintō* 国家神道)
- Origin in rural society
- Some groups have women as founders:
said to be “speakers” of a highest god

2nd period

Taishō (1912-1926) and early Shōwa (1926-1989)-era:

- Nationalism and Militarism
- Urbanization and beginning of industrialization
- Origin in towns
- More Buddhist-based groups
- Persecutions

Examples

Reiyūkai 霊友会 1925

Sekai Kyūseikyō 世界救世教 1928

Seichō no ie 成長の家 1929

Sōka Gakkai 創価学会 1930

3rd period

After WWII 1945:

- Separation of state and religion
- „Freedom of believe“: *shinkyō no jiyū* 信教の自由
- *Shūkyō hōjin hō* 宗教法人法 (*Law on religious corporations*)

Examples

- P(erfect) L(iberty) Kyōdan (former Hito no michi Kyōkai 人の道教会 1924))

- Mahikari 1963

4th period

- Since 1970ties: the „new new religions“
shin-shinshūkyō 新新宗教
- Further diversification
- New “spiritual” trend
- Importance of Anglo-American “New Age”/Western Esotericism
- Use of modern mass-media

Examples

- G(od) L(ight) A(ssociation) 1968
- Agonshū 1978
- Aum Shinrikyō 1984
- Kōfuku no kagaku 1986
- Worldmate

5th period (added to the periodization of Tagaki Hirō)

After Sarin-gas attack in Tokyo subway 1995 by
members of Aum Shinrikyō

- Changes in the religious corporation law
- More restrictive and cautious look on younger
developments
- Membership figures of the *shin-shinshūkyō* 新新宗教
are stagnating since 2000 (the latest)

*The future is open to new developments: “Qué será,
será ...”*